

SHORT HAUL

Dreaming of the Algarve

Lift spirits by planning a foodie trip to Portugal's delicious southern coast, writes **Nicole Whitton**

Famous for its fresh seafood and sun-soaked dining, Portugal's Algarve region could be top of your post lockdown list.

Its cuisine has been shaped by a tumultuous past of conquests and periods of foreign occupation; almonds, citrus and rice, for example, were introduced by the Moors. Economic hardship also forced residents to get creative with their cooking and celebrate simple pleasures, making garlic, bread and wine staples on the kitchen table.

The result is an inventive cuisine, where simple ingredients are combined with exotic flavours to create a rich variety of dishes.

A taste of the sea

A 20 minute-drive from Faro, 2 Passos restaurant (restaurante2passos.com/en/; mains from €14.50/£12.60) is a wonderful introduction to the wild Atlantic coastline and the region's fabulous seafood offerings. It's best to share plates, as you won't want to miss out on the salmon gravadlax, fresh clams, juicy langoustines and sea bass cooked the Algarve way, with tomatoes and garlic. Accompanied by local wines, the menu is a real treat, and food is easily walked off along the shoreline.

Comprised of fish, bread and hard-boiled egg, with a punchy injection of garlic and coriander, *acorda* is a seafood broth beloved by locals. Try it at O Palhacinho, just outside Faro's local market (€6/£5.25 per person).

Raising the game

Fish may take centre stage, but

carnivores are also catered for in these parts. Located in the small hamlet of Barranco do Velho ('Hill of the Old Man'), A Tia Bia restaurant (atiabia.com/en/; mains from €9.50/£8.26) can attract up to 200 diners a day. Highlights include deer and plum stew or oven-baked black pork cheek.

At sophisticated steakhouse Bovino (quintadolago.com/en/restaurants/bovino-steakhouse/; sharing platter for four €65/£56.40 per person) in Faro, the sharing platter is recommended; it's the best way to sample the various cuts of rump, fillet, prime reserve and USDA New York strip.

Urban dining

Faro offers an impressive range of restaurants amidst its winding lanes, opulent churches, sleepy marina and historic town centre.

A Venda is excellent for inventive cuisine. When I visited, the roasted mackerel in tomatoes and onions was sublime, with the fish-egg salad providing a zesty accompaniment.

Algarve wines are rare outside the area – producers are too small to export much – so it was a real pleasure to sample Portal da Vinha, a lively white from the Alentejo region.

Or, if you fancy reclining in the sunshine, you could do worse than Cidade Velha (restaurantecidadevelhafaro.negocio.site; mains from €11/£9.56) in the old town. Try fresh tuna belly marinated in garlic, pot-boiled clams pared with xarem (similar to a wet preparation of couscous, made of cornflour, garlic, herbs and water), it's

a great place to dine and take in the surroundings; massive stork nests sit atop historic buildings and orange trees line the roads, heavenly fragrant from late February until mid-March.

Market marvels

From crusty Pao de Cabeca loaves to creamy ricotta-style goat's cheese, Faro's local market is a foodie's delight.

Join retired gents bantering about football at Snack Bar da Xica for a breakfast of bifana sandwich (€2.25/£1.95). The pork, marinated in garlic and wine, will line your stomach – particularly useful given that you won't be judged here for starting your day with a glass of red.

Where to stay

Four Seasons Fairways, with its self-catering accommodation, is particularly handy for the gastronomic tourist: it's close to restaurants and local markets, but comes with a fully equipped kitchen for you to release that inner chef. You can even request barbecue meats or order groceries from the supermarket to your door – ready for your arrival.

The resort's fine dining restaurant, Amara (amararestaurant.pt/; four-course chef's tasting menu €39/£33.89), is a must-visit, whether you stay here or not. Prices are reasonable and dishes exquisite.

The wine workshops are also not to be missed. Hosted by sommelier Miguel Reis, whose grandfather owned a vineyard, it's the perfect way to discover Algarve wines. Workshops cost €25/£21.85 per person. ■



Due to COVID-19, check for trading updates; Four Seasons Fairways (fourseasonsfairways.com) starts from €1,200/£1,045 for a two-bedroom villa (sleeps six); visit algarve.com

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Clockwise from main: lunch by the sea; migas with cod and shrimp at A Tia Bia; Four Seasons Fairways; salmon appetisers at Amara

